

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

**DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU**

---

Celebrating Scholarship and Creativity Day

Undergraduate Research

---

4-26-2018

## Christians, Pagans, and Death

Erin Baumer

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*, [eebaumer@csbsju.edu](mailto:eebaumer@csbsju.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur\\_cscday](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday)



Part of the [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Baumer, Erin, "Christians, Pagans, and Death" (2018). *Celebrating Scholarship and Creativity Day*. 15.  
[https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur\\_cscday/15](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday/15)

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Celebrating Scholarship and Creativity Day by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csbsju.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csbsju.edu).

Erin Baumer

Greek Capstone

Spring 2018

## **Christians, Pagans, and Death**

### **I. Introduction**

To what extent was Christianity a new and original religion? Christianity began in the first century C.E. after the execution of Jesus of Nazareth and has been shaping the world since. It would appear, however, that many pagan religions and philosophies contributed to Christianity's ideology, particularly when it came to matters of the soul. A Greek religion that modern scholars commonly refer to as "Orphism" alongside Judaism especially helped to develop what Christians believed and preached about the soul and afterlife.

Thus far, there has not been much scholarship on the influences of pagan religions and philosophical teachings on Christianity concerning the idea of the afterlife. W.C.K. Guthrie and Dale B. Martin, however, have touched upon it. When looking in particular at Orphism and Christianity with a fresh view, I noticed a number of similarities. This paper systematically first works through what Orphism is, what early Christian traditions were, and what some of the similarities between the two religions are. They include original sin, ideas about Heaven and Hell, and especially ideas of Purgatory. While the origins of Purgatory are currently debated as a late developing idea within the Church, the concept was already alive at the foundation of Christianity.

## **I. “Orphism”**

Orphism was an ancient Greek religion supposedly created by the mythological Orpheus. Initiates of this mystery cult believed that Orpheus was the one who wrote their religious documents. While there are some teachings that are definitively labeled as Orphism, modern scholars have labeled many more as Orphic. Some of these teachings seem to be contradictory. Due to the fact that there were no central teachings, however, I am willing to accept this label of Orphism for such documents. Whether these texts were considered Orphic by the original authors or not, however, this will be a discussion on Greek religions in general.

### **A. Who was Orpheus?**

Orpheus was an important mythological character to the Greeks (Britannica). Orpheus was a Greek hero who was known for his musical ability. He was also one of the Argonauts who went with Jason to find the Golden Fleece. When he returned from the long journey, he married a woman named Eurydice. When she was killed soon after by a snake, he was determined to get her back. Through his music, he enchanted the earth to open and allow him to walk all the way to the Underworld. When he arrived, Hades was so moved by the music that he allowed him to bring Eurydice back, on one condition: he could not look at her until she was in the sunlight. If he failed she would disappear forever. So Orpheus began to play his music again and led Eurydice back home to the surface. But once Orpheus reached the sunlight, he turned to look at Eurydice, who was still in the shadows. She was whisked back to the Underworld and was lost to him forever.

### **B. Orphic Mythology**

One of the founding principles of Orphism was their mythology, which differed from the one that is commonly known today. Many who grew up learning Greek mythology know that

Zeus, God of the Sky, is the king of the gods. He became king after killing his father, Kronos (Hesiod, 491). Kronos in his turn had supplanted his father, Ouranos, by chopping off his penis and taking control of the universe (Hesiod, 167). Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest, is one of Zeus's sisters (Hesiod, 491). Through their coupling, Persephone, queen of the Underworld, is born (Hesiod, 912). Through a different coupling of Zeus and a mortal princess, Semele, Dionysus, God of Wine and Parties, is born (Hesiod, 940).

Orphic mythology differs greatly when it comes to these figures. Two sources in particular provide an excellent overview: Alberto Bernabé's article about an important Orphic find, which was called the Derveni Theogony papyrus, and chapter two of Jan Bremmer's book, The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife.

According to the Orphics, after killing his father, Kronos, Zeus swallows Ouranos' penis, and "becomes a kind of father (or better, 'mother') of him, a being that biologically precedes him" and becomes the "ἀρχή" of the universe. This Greek word has two associations: "king" and "beginning." Zeus has become both by becoming the parent of Ouranos, his grandfather. He is now the head of the genealogical line of the gods (Bernabé, 109). After this, Zeus was able to recreate the universe into a better place. This includes rebirthing all the gods who had previously existed, including his own mother, Rhea (Bernabé, 114).

Zeus's rise to power and reworking of the universe, according to the Derveni Theogony, was predestined (Bernabé, 104). Additionally, when Zeus became his own ancestor, he stopped the cycle of violence and stabilized the universe, which means that events were meant to happen and the changes would be permanent. Thus Zeus would not be supplanted as his father and

grandfather were before him, but instead would rule eternally. This also means that the order of the universe would not be changed again.

Zeus then begins to create the next generation of gods. Within this myth, Persephone is the daughter of Zeus and his mother, Rhea. An interesting observation that Bernabé makes is that in the *Rhapsodies*, Rhea is identified with Demeter (121). This aligns the Orphic mythology a little more closely with what many might consider the “standard” mythology. Dionysus in this mythology is the son of Zeus and Persephone. Dionysus, however, was killed by the Titans. When Zeus killed the murderers, mankind rose from the ashes. This gave mankind a divine, though tainted heritage. This was where the Orphic idea of original sin came from (Bremmer, 21-22).

The way to atone for this original sin, as well as any other sins you might commit in your life, was to be initiated as an Orphic and to follow the Orphic rules. These rules are being debated since, as a mystery cult, they were very secretive about their beliefs. Then, if you were able to atone for everything, Dionysus would intercede to Persephone on your behalf, and she would decide whether you should go to the wonderful part of the Underworld, which was always sunny, or the bad part of the Underworld. There did not appear to be a middle ground (Bremmer, 22).

In his book Greek Life and Thought, La Rue Van Hook talks about the idea of prenatal sin. According to his work, someone would be redeemed and saved from this prenatal sin if and only if he became an initiate of the Orphic cult (258). In other words, becoming an initiate was necessary and sufficient, regardless of how that person lived the rest of their life. In this way, as above, Orphism is claiming to be the only way to avoid damnation for the sins committed by the Titans, mankind’s apparent ancestors.

### **C. Body, Soul, and Reincarnation**

With a foundation of Orphic mythology now understood, we can turn to the relationship between the body and the soul. Orphics had the belief that there was a very clear distinction between the body and soul, as opposed to the idea that one could not exist without the other. This separation raises the question of where the soul goes after death, since it is not destroyed with the body. While the Underworld has already been mentioned, another idea within Orphism is that of reincarnation.

Van Hook writes, “The body was regarded as an impeding material element imprisoning the soul, which was divine and immortal” (258). This view was followed by the idea of transmigration and reincarnation, which was a “cycle caused by sin [which] might be shortened by virtuous conduct... vegetarianism, and... an elaborate ritual” (258). Orphism had very strict practices that would bring about salvation, or allow someone to enter into the good part of the Underworld.

Orpheus and Greek Religion by W.C.K. Guthrie discusses the idea that the body was a punishment for crimes in heaven (167). In order to reach the point of salvation, one had to overcome the bodily appetites and passions that come with being human. If one’s soul was able to overcome the body, then Hades would be a good place to be after death. If, however, one’s soul was unable to do so, Hades would be a cause of further unhappiness.

The soul’s stay in the Underworld, however, does not appear to have been a necessarily long stay. Instead, the soul would eventually be reincarnated into a new body. The eventual goal was to live such a good life that the cycle of reincarnation, of life and death, would be broken and the soul would be returned to heaven, from which it fell. Luckily, every time someone was able

to live a virtuous life, the next life he lived would be an improvement to the last one. If, however, someone led a life that was not virtuous, the next life he lived would be worse.

The reason the soul had fallen from heaven was because it been imperfect while in the “highest heaven,” its “true home” (Guthrie, 167). The idea that the soul has fallen does not necessarily match with the idea of prenatal sin that was mentioned above. This version of a prenatal sin involves a personal imperfection a soul has while in Heaven. The previous idea of original sin is due to something that is out of any one soul’s control. Instead it comes from the fact that humans are descended from Titans. This discrepancy could be from the fact that there was no central authoritative text.

The idea of reincarnation, then, is the process of trying to get back into heaven. This process takes ten thousand years, in one thousand year segments, divided by the soul being trapped within a body for the duration of one lifetime. These segments between lives were spent either suffering punishment or in blessedness. How a soul spent this time was based on how it lived the life before each segment. After the ten thousand years were over, the soul was admitted back into heaven. In the event that a soul lived a particularly heinous life and was judged to be unredeemable, it was punished not just for the thousand years directly afterwards, but for the rest of eternity (Guthrie, 167). Thus, however the Orphics looked at original sin, someone was required to live a certain way in each life in order to improve his lot after death.

Let us now look closely at Plato’s work *Phaedo*. This work had a lot to say about different views on the body and soul relation and reincarnation, as well as the afterlife in general. Many of these views reflected what modern scholars have labeled “Orphism,” although Plato never used the word himself in this text.

The setting for this work is in Socrates' jail cell. He is awaiting his execution, which has been scheduled for that day. In order to console his friends who have gathered there to spend this final day with him, he has a discussion with them about the soul and what happens to it after death. In this work, Phaedo is the character relating the story, hence the title of the work.

The first thing Socrates and his friends discuss is that death is something that should be desired by philosophers (61b). He backs up this claim by discussing "the doctrine that is taught in secret...that we men are in a kind of prison" (62b). Death, then, is "the separation of the soul from the body" (64c). Thus, since philosophers desire nothing more than to separate their soul from their body in order that they are no longer tied down by bodily needs, they desire death (67e). This idea that death is the freeing of the soul certainly matches what Van Hook and Guthrie have stated about Orphism.

Socrates and his friends then go on to explain that the soul is immortal, existing both before and after it comes into the body, so that they can decide logically that the soul is a completely separate entity from the body. Thus they can begin to discuss where the soul goes after the body dies (80d-84b). Socrates says that this has to do with how much effort the individual put into the body as opposed to the soul (philosophy). If he was base and cared for the body, then his soul would be more deeply connected to the body during life. Therefore, after death, the soul would be "defiled and impure" (81b). Thus when the soul is reincarnated, the defiled souls are "imprisoned in natures which correspond to the practices of their former lives," such as a tiger (81e). Those who care for the soul over the body and learn philosophy, however, are reincarnated as "gentle species" or as men (82b). Socrates claims that only these men can end up in communion with the gods, the ultimate goal of souls.



#### **D. What is the Underworld?**

For the Greeks, the Underworld was an all-inclusive term for the afterlife, excepting a union with the gods in heaven. Therefore, it is very important to look at what the Orphics thought of the Underworld and how they visualized it. The clearest description of the Underworld that I have found that is connected with Orphism is again from Plato's "Phaedo."

Once Socrates has proven the immortality of the soul and the concept of reincarnation, he gives his personal description of what the afterlife is like (107d-115b). He describes the journey to begin with as a gathering of the dead. A person's tutor leads them to this gathering, where they are judged. Then they are led by a designated guide through the winding paths. Socrates says he infers this from "the rites and ceremonies practiced here on earth" (108a). This wording implies that it is an Orphic teaching, although it could also apply to any mystery cult. He says that the souls that have been judged pure go to the good places of the earth, and the bad wander through the paths without a guide until a set time when they are fetched and brought to their rightful place.

Socrates also discusses the geography of the earth and the Underworld. He mentions how the souls that were judged neither pure nor impure are brought to the bank of the river Acheron, where they are purified. If they have done any wrong, they are absolved, and if they have done good, they are rewarded. Those who are impure and judged irredeemable are thrown into Tartarus to suffer. This is the first mention I have found to a destination of post-mortem purification, and as such is an important detail.

Orphism is an interesting religion that offers insight into Greek views of the soul and afterlife. Some of these topics carry smoothly over to Christianity, although Christianity adds its own questions as well.

## **II. Christianity**

Discussions on the afterlife in Christianity consist in three key topics: the relationship between body and soul, the divinity and bodily resurrection of Jesus and therefore Christians, and the ideas of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory as the possible destinations of the soul after death. There were three major traditions emerging in Christianity in the first century C.E. that differed greatly on this point: Gnostics, Jewish Christians, and the early Church Fathers, or the precursors to modern Christianity.

### **A. Gnostic Christians**

The Gnostic tradition was heavily influenced by Plato and Plutarch. Their name comes from their emphasis on γνῶσις, or knowledge and acquaintance with the divine, for their salvation. The Gnostics are difficult to study because the Church Fathers later declared this group to be heretics, and many of their teachings were destroyed (Forger, 62).

Gnostics had a view of creation that was different from the story of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament of the Bible. In their story, God did not create the world. Instead, a lesser god, or demiurge, named Ialdabaoth, created the world with malevolent spirits (Forger, 63-65).

The story goes that Sophia, or Wisdom, who was God's divine consort, decided to procreate asexually. The result was Ialdabaoth, who was a monstrosity. He was deformed at birth and, because he was not allowed into Heaven due to his unnaturalness, he thought that he was God (Forger, 64). When he was born, he stole some of Sophia's powers and created earth (which the Gnostics considered to be Hell), evil accomplices, and "material bodies to enslave humanity" (Forger, 65-67). In other words, he created prisons, but there was nothing to put in them. The

bodies were immobile and lifeless at their creation. Sophia tricked him into breathing her stolen powers into Adam to give him life and thus spread “divine spirit into a portion of humanity” (Forger, 65).

The goal of Gnostics, then, is to gain knowledge of themselves through a savior, who descends to earth three times. When he (or she) descends, the savior puts on a human body but does not actually become human. One of these figures was Jesus. Whoever the savior teaches, then, are able to free themselves from the bondage of Ialdabaoth and the material world and his malevolent spirits and return to heaven (Forger, 66).

Thus Gnostics viewed Heaven as a spiritual reunion with God and an escape from the Hell of the material world. This could only be done through γνῶσις: faith in Jesus meant faith in his message, and thus his knowledge. It is very important to emphasize that Gnostics believed in the Platonic idea of a separation in soul and body, which the other two traditions of Christianity did not, as will be shown.

## **B. Jewish Christians**

Jewish Christians have been difficult to study as well, as most of their documents were also destroyed. The only evidence that remains of their beliefs comes from their opponents, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Origen (Forger, 69). This makes it difficult to know for sure what this tradition believed, and what their opponents only claimed they believed, thus setting an example of what not to believe.

As shown already, the Gnostics believed that Jesus was entirely divine and only put on the body of a man. The Jewish Christians went to the other extreme. They claimed that Jesus was

entirely human, and that his biological father was Joseph, not God (Forger, 69). Jesus was created like an archangel, instead of being the son of God (Forger, 71). This caused a lot of tension between this group and the early Church Fathers, who made sure they were discredited as heretics.

According to the Jewish Christians, the key to salvation was similar to what was true for Jews after the end times. As long as you kept the commandments and were Jewish, you were saved. This is where their view of Jesus stemmed from. Because they were only able to worship one God according to the commandments, they could not accept both God and Jesus as divine. Therefore, to comply with their faith, Jesus must be an entirely human prophet (Forger, 71).

The Jewish Christians had a body of works that did not end up canon in the New Testament due to the aforementioned destruction. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, however, a supposedly Jewish Christian work, still survives (Forger, 70-71). This work provides a detailed look at both Heaven and Hell. According to this work, Jesus describes Heaven has a wonderful place where the angels adorn the righteous with the clothes of Heaven. Hell, on the other hand, is full of fire, darkness, and obscurity. The bad shall suffer eternally with punishments that befit their crimes. For example, prostitutes will be hung by their braids, since they used them to lure men to sin.

If this is, in fact, a Jewish Christian text, they had a very clear idea of what Heaven and Hell were like and what they would have to do to get to either place. They were very straightforward in their teachings, and they were directly opposed to the Church Fathers, who ultimately won the seat of dominance.

### **C. Early Church Fathers, and Paul**

The early Church Fathers were the ultimate basis for Orthodox Christianity and as such have ideas that will sound most familiar to Christians today (Forger, 71). They managed to survive so long because they gave the church meaning on earth through gatherings and the Eucharist instead of focusing almost entirely on the afterlife, as the Gnostics did (Forger, 75). Even within their ranks, however, there was dissension.

The foundation of the Church Fathers' doctrine came from their view that Jesus was both human and divine (Forger, 73). This paradoxical nature was what enabled him to save humanity. Through him and his death, mankind could now become both human and divine after their own deaths. This nature also allowed Jesus to "bridge the gap" between the mortal and immortal realms (Forger, 73).

Their pathway to salvation also differs greatly from the Gnostics and Jewish Christians. In the view of the Church Fathers, the way to redemption is through the Eucharist and obedience to the church (Forger, 73-74). Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in 110CE, called the Eucharist the "medicine of immortality," showing his emphasis on the Eucharist for salvation (Forger, 73). Additionally, if you followed the rules of the church, then you would live in Christ after death. If you did not follow these rules, you would stay dead. For the early Church Fathers, there was no middle ground (Forger, 75).

Paul, a Church Father and the attributed author of thirteen letters in the New Testament, is a key source on what that life after death was. Although Paul went against one segment of the church, he had a view of the resurrection that was innovative for the time and has lasted through

the centuries (Martin, 135). Paul was the first Christian writer to focus on the bodily resurrection, and this idea unsettled most of the Greco-Roman world (Bremmer, 42-43).

Plutarch, in his work on Romulus, said that ““to mix heaven and earth is foolish”” (Martin, 113). This phrase applies to Paul’s idea of the bodily resurrection. The body was seen as a purely earthly thing, and thus a resurrected body would not be able to participate in Heaven or immortality. The wording of a bodily resurrection also brings to mind the resuscitation of a corpse instead of the joining of a πνεῦμα with God in Heaven (Martin, 111-112). For example, Greeks would have thought of Asclepius raising the dead, or Hercules bringing back Alcestis from Hades. This is not what Paul had in mind.

Paul wanted to make a distinction between the σῶμα, ψυχή, and the σὰρξ (Martin, 124). For him, the σὰρξ was the earthly body, and used to describe that which humans have in common with other living beings (Martin, 124). The σῶμα was the heavenly body, like that of a star. The πνεῦμα, then, was what humanity had in common with the stars, and that was the substance which was resurrected in a σῶμα (Martin, 128). This brings up a question of whether or not Paul wants to say that humans were resurrected as stars, and what that would mean. If this is what Paul had in mind, it would reflect the ideas of many Greek philosophies, such as Stoics and Platonists, as well as Jews (Martin, 118).

Whatever this resurrection would look like, it is central to Paul’s faith. He writes,

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain (1 Corinthians, 12-14).

The centerpiece of everything that Paul believes and teaches is the resurrection. For him, then, the way to achieve this resurrection for ourselves is to avoid sin and live righteously (1 Corinthians, 15:56). Sin is what causes death to be eternal. Living rightly and avoiding sin allows for eternal life and a bodily resurrection with God in Heaven.

#### **D. Purgatory**

Each of these three traditions of Christianity mentioned what Heaven and Hell were in their ideologies, but none mentioned a middle ground, or Purgatory, the third destination for the soul after death in Christian teachings. There is much debate about where the idea of Purgatory originated. “Purgatory” was not a term that was created until the twelfth century and was not made canon within the Catholic Church until the 1439 Council of Florence (O’Callaghan, 296). This council was an attempt to reconcile the Catholic and Orthodox churches and again form one Christian church. Among many issues discussed was Purgatory and a formal definition was finally given:

For those who ‘are truly penitent and die in God’s love before having satisfied by worthy fruits of penance for their sins of commission and omission...their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial penalties [*poenis purgatoriis*], the acts of intercession [*suffragia*] of the living faithful benefit them, namely the sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, alms and other works of piety which the faithful are wont to do for the other faithful according to the Church’s practice.’ (O’ Callaghan, 296)

The concept of Purgatory had been one that had helped with the split between the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Purgatory was a purely Catholic idea. As we can see today, these churches are still separate, although for many more reasons than simply Purgatory.

Before this formal definition was made, however, Hildegard of Bingen wrote an Underworld Vision narrative between 1158 and 1163, titled *Liber vitae meritorum* (Newman, 91). This narrative gave a clear topographical map of Purgatory and she described it as a place “for all souls destined to be saved, provided they have died in a state of contrition but without completely the penance owed for their sins” (Newman, 92). While she says that people are tortured in Purgatory for their sins, even by demons, there is a distinction between Purgatory and Hell. For her, no mortal can grasp what the pains of Hell will be (Newman, 92).

Hildegard seems to have a very unique picture of where Purgatory is (Newman, 94). She divides the globe into five regions. The earth is in the central region, and earthly paradise is east. The other three-fifths of the planet is Purgatory. Each region has its own tortures, climates, and monsters. This is where the blights, plagues, and diseases on earth come from, created by the sins of those in Purgatory. Hell is beyond the earth, arcing across the western hemisphere.

While an intriguing view of Purgatory, it is still not the oldest possible mention within Christian literature. In 203, Saint Perpetua was martyred in Carthage. Before her death, she received a vision of her younger brother, Dinocrates, who had died of an illness as a child (7). In her vision, he appeared to her across a gulf. He still looked to be the age that he died, which was seven. He also still had the ulcers on his face, the visual representation of his deadly illness. She saw him reach up to a font of water, hot and thirsty, but he could not reach it. After praying for him for a few days and night, she has another vision of Dinocrates (8). In this vision, the ulcers are gone from his face and he is wearing clothes. He is still in the same place, but he is now able to drink from the font and is satisfied and joyful as he plays.



There is speculation that this is an early version of Purgatory (Bremmer, 63). Since Dinocrates did not change location, but during the second vision is no longer suffering, this would make sense. He was not a Christian, so by Christian standards he would not be allowed into Heaven, but he also does not deserve Hell, especially after Perpetua intercedes on his behalf through her prayers.

But ideas of Purgatory can be traced back even further. Origen of Alexandria, one of the church founders, lived 185-254CE. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, he writes that everyone goes through a purifying fire, which is God's very presence (Blosser, 245). This fire is only painful for sinners, although incredibly so. It is also a time of learning and illumination for everyone and allows souls to move toward God, so that even though it is painful, it is extremely beneficial.

The history of Purgatory is complex and fascinating, but inconclusive up to this point. It seems the idea, at least, can be traced through Christian works back to Origen in the late second and early third century, CE.

### **III. Orphism and Christianity: How do they connect?**

After a discussion of the basic points of Christianity and Orphism and their views of the soul and afterlife, there are a number of interesting points of similarity. There is no proof, however, that Christianity did borrowed all of them from Orphism. These ideas include the idea of original sin and where the soul goes after death. One place where Christianity did borrow from Orphism is the concept of Purgatory.

Original sin is an important issue in Christianity and Orphism alike. In the case of the former, the Gnostics offer insight. While I did not see an instance when they used the phrase

“original/prenatal sin,” they do have an idea of a human taint through Ialdabaoth as the creator. He put humanity on earth, and through him humanity is forced to search for knowledge to free themselves. Thus, through the action of a single creature, all of humanity has been punished with life on earth (or in Hell) and must earn their escape and union with God in Heaven.

From the discussion in I.B, it is clear that prenatal sin was an important aspect of Orphism as well. As mentioned, the Titans when they killed Zeus’ son, and therefore every member of humanity is tainted by their sin. The sin must be atoned for through cultic purification.

When placed side by side, the similarity is startling. Each religion points the blame of human taint on a single entity or species, whether Ialdabaoth or the Titans. Each religion also has an escape route that includes knowledge. For the Gnostics, it is the knowledge from the savior on how to defeat Ialdabaoth. For the Orphics, it is the knowledge that Orphism provided and through this the intercession of Dionysus to his mother Persephone. They each thought that by following their rules and beliefs, and their rules and beliefs only, someone would be saved. While this is most likely not a case of borrowing, their similarity is intriguing. I am not here to pass judgment on which was right or wrong, but it can be noted that not both can be right.

But where does the soul go after the body dies? Both Orphism and Christianity have an idea of a Good Place (Heaven) and a Bad Place (Hell). Each had an ultimate goal of reunion with the gods, or God, in heaven through the right actions that the religion prescribed. They also had a concept of punishment for bad behavior. A more interesting comparison can be found in the idea of Purgatory.

While Purgatory was a developing issue in Christianity, specifically within Catholicism, Orphism already had an idea of postmortem redemption, as evidenced through Plato’s work. The

character Socrates' idea of a place along the River Acheron where souls can be purified seems to be distinctly related to the Catholic idea of purification. Both the souls along the Acheron and the souls in Purgatory seem to have a desire to atone for their sins in order to be blessed either with a better next life or a reunion with the gods/God. Interestingly, also seem to be passive participants. Along the Acheron, the souls *are* purified and absolved of their sins. In Purgatory, the souls *are* purified by fire and filled with the knowledge of God. While the desire is active, the actions of purification are passive.

While there are many further comparisons to be made, these are the ones I want to focus on.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Christianity developed amidst a fertile philosophical and religious environment in the Greco-Roman world. Therefore, there are many similarities that can be found between Christianity and pagan religions and philosophies. In particular, there are a number of similarities between Christianity and the Greek mystery cult of Orphism. While not all of these similarities can be linked as direct influences on Christianity, there is one aspect of Orphism that can be.

It seems to me that the seeds of Purgatory were already sown before the birth of Christianity, and thus Christianity developed with those seeds already inside. By the time of Origen's writings, Purgatory was already an idea that many Christians would have heard. This idea became one of hope for early Christians, and continued to be so for centuries to come. Eventually, it was accepted as canon within the Catholic Church, although other traditions of Christianity did not agree. Even so, it has now become a symbol that while man is not perfect, and can never be, we are still deserving of salvation.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Genesis. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press, 1989

Hesiod. *Theogony*. Translated by Glenn W. Most. Harvard University Press, 2006.

Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by C. J. Rowe, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press, 1989

Perpetua, Saint. "The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity." Translated by W. H. Shewring, *Internet History Sourcebooks*, 1996, [sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/perpetua.asp](http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/perpetua.asp).

### Secondary Sources

Bernabé, Alberto. "The Derveni Theogony: Many Questions and Some Answers." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 103, 2007, pp. 99–133. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/30032220](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30032220).

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Orpheus." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 8 Feb. 2018, [www.britannica.com/topic/Orpheus-Greek-mythology](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Orpheus-Greek-mythology).  
Bremmer, Jan N. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol*. Routledge, 2002.

Forger, Deborah. *Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife: Eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Vol. 2. Edited by J. Harold Ellens, Praeger, 2013.

Guthrie, W.K.C. *Orpheus and Greek Religion*. Princeton University Press, 1993.

Martin, Dale B. *The Corinthian Body*. Yale University Press, 1995.

Newman, Barbara. "Hildegard of Bingen and the 'Birth of Purgatory.'" *Mystics Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1993, pp. 90–97. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20717170](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20717170).

O'Callaghan, Paul. "Purgatory: The Purification of the Elect." *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2011, pp. 286–308. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fgq3j.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fgq3j.15).